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From: Shore, Berry
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LeBrun: PFOA water crisis won't evaporate

by Fred LeBrun

Updated 9:53 am, Monday, May 23, 2016

Albany Times Union

Life in the fast lane of a Superfund site anxious to become uncontaminated is moving agonizingly slowly and with stuttering progress for Hoosick Falls.

After what seems a needlessly long and unexplained delay, blood test results are finally scheduled to be received by 900 or so residents, who have been anxiously waiting. Various levels of PFOA, perflourooctanoic acid, a strongly suspected carcinogen, are expected. Blood test results can be good news, bad news or worse news. The state Health Department has indicated results have been held while the state agency drafts a guidance plan for every level.

Given how much this is on the minds of residents who have been drinking contaminated water for more than a half century from the town water supply raises eyebrows over why the state couldn't move the process along a little faster. Particularly since already on line are a bounty of protocols and guidance documents from peer-reviewed studies of previous PFOA blood work from other American plastics work sites just like Hoosick Falls. And even more to the point, the Health Department already has a dubious reputation for initially proclaiming the water perfectly safe to drink.

More than 30,000 have already been tested elsewhere, with manufacturer Dupont picking up the tab, much of it contributing to the benchmark C8 studies on PFOA. So there's a ton of good information out there that doesn't need re-creating.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has issued a guidance calling for no more than 70 parts per trillion for lifetime exposure to PFOA and the related perfluorinate PFOS in drinking water. That will replace the 100 parts famously

announced by EPA Regional Director Judith Enck when she visited Hoosick Falls and kicked into high gear recognition of the PFOA crisis in the village.

It's not all that clear what the new EPA designation means, since it is not legally enforceable. The EPA is not expected to even decide on whether to take this toxic chemistry through the regulatory mill toward enforceable status until 2019. Also, how is a lifetime defined? Is it the same thing as long term? Sounds like lawyerly mischief to me.

A maximum level of 70 ppt in the drinking water is a compromise. Recent research on the very young indicates consequences even with levels much lower than 70. Roughly, 70 ppt in drinking water translates to 7 parts per billion in blood. The referenced C8 study showed about a 10 percent increased chance of certain cancers and other specific diseases as a result of 5 to 10 ppt in blood. A risk, but not a big risk, and arguably not a bad compromise given the huge costs to purify the water that skyrocket as acceptable limits dive.

The heads of the state Department of Environmental Conservation and Health Department said they were pleased the EPA had set a standard, because in doing so it acknowledged "that PFOA is not a state or regional problem, but rather a national problem." Well, they're half right. It is a national problem, since 6.5 million Americans in 27 states are drinking water contaminated by perfluorinates to some degree. But to suggest that if it's a national problem then it is less a local problem is blather. The opposite. Ask the folks in Hoosick Falls how local their problem is.

Last week the DEC elevated Taconic Plastics in Petersburg near the banks of the Little Hoosick to Superfund status along with St. Gobain in Hoosick Falls. The DEC has known about PFOA contamination from this plant affecting the local water supply for more than a decade, because the company alerted the DEC to it.

This poses an interesting dilemma for Hoosick Falls. The Little Hoosick flows into the Hoosick, and it's along the Hoosick that many of the test wells are being dug by the state for the promised alternative water supply of the future, key to uncontaminating the village. You have to wonder, as most certainly do home owners with potentially compromised wells along both streams.

This is not a problem going away anytime soon, as much as Gov. Andrew Cuomo and legislative leaders would like it all to disappear without any look back. Water problems will only increase in numbers and variations, consequences of a planet now permeated by man-made chemistry created with little regard for the end game fast on us. The bigger picture is why hearings on what went wrong with the PFOA water crisis in Hoosick Falls remain critical.

The one shining light on all this at the moment is U.S. Rep. Chris Gibson's calling for a congressional investigation of the state and federal response to the PFOA contaminations in eastern Rensselaer County, along the lines of hearings held on the Flint, Michigan, water crisis.

If any of our state leaders wonder what the Bernie Sanders revolution is all about, why the young are revolted by establishment politics, all they have to do is look at themselves over Hoosick Falls. Brushing off hearings of accountability is an arrogant disregard for what actually matters to the citizenry, a failure to recognize how important it is. Small wonder faith in our state government right now is at an all time low, fast approaching the feds hiding down in the basement.

Sadly, Gibson is getting out of politics, but can you blame him? Particularly as a Republican. He's a moderate and he makes sense most of the time. Obviously he's traveling with the wrong crowd. We wish him well on getting his life back.

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Assembly covers up for Cuomo in the Hoosick Falls water crisis

By Post Editorial Board

May 22, 2016 | 8:05pm

NY Post

Even if the Cuomo administration knowingly let Hoosick Falls residents drink poisoned water, the Assembly won't hold hearings on it, because they might embarrass the governor.

That's just about what Speaker Carl Heastie (D-Bronx) announced last week, though he didn't have the guts to put it that way.

Heastie was explaining why the Assembly continues to block a look-see into the state's worst environmental disaster in years, even though a bipartisan group of lawmakers (and even Heastie himself) saw them as critical just a few months ago.

"In light of issues at places like Hoosick Falls and Flint, Mich., we are planning hearings in April to examine statewide water-quality issues," a Heastie aide vowed in February. But April came and went, with no hearings.

And now the speaker claims they're not even needed, at least for now. "We just don't think it's necessary absolutely at this point," he said last week. "The state has taken action to resolve the issue in Hoosick Falls and other places."

Nothing to see here, folks, in other words.

Heastie denies he's protecting Gov. Cuomo from embarrassment.

But Hoosick Falls residents deserve to know why the state failed to issue warnings or take precautions after 2014 tests showed their water contained perfluorooctanoic acid, which is linked to cancer and other diseases.

They also deserve answers to tough questions about the current state of their water.

And all New Yorkers deserve meaningful assurances that their water is OK — and will stay that way.

If no one is held accountable when the government lies about water safety, how can the public feel confident that what they're drinking is safe?

Petersburgh Residents Pickup Water After EPA Released New Guidelines on PFOA, PFOS

By Jorja Roman

Saturday, May 21, 2016 at 02:51 PM EDT/Tuesday, May 24, 2016

TWC News – Capital Region

Petersburgh residents learned of the new EPA guideline for PFOA and PFOS in their drinking water this past week. Saturday was the first day since the announcement that residents were picking up their bottled water from town hall. Jorja Roman spoke with some people who came out to get their water.

PETERSBURGH, N.Y. -- The routine for residents in Petersburgh has been the same for months and it won't be changing for a while, even though the EPA announced new health guidelines for how much PFOA or PFOS can be in drinking water.

"I think a lot of people thought that it should have been lowered further," said Paul Renner, a Petersburgh resident.

The new level for long-term exposure to the chemicals is 70 parts for trillion, rather than 100. Some residents like Paul Renner are still waiting for the results from testing their private wells.

"I'm patient but I'm expecting that it should be happening soon," Renner said.

Other Petersburg residents are fortunate to have a water source with even lower levels than the EPA guideline. Melissa Lockett's private well tested at 19 parts per trillion.

"I figure, it's low enough. They're telling me that it's not anything to worry about so we've just been drinking it," said Lockett.

But the contaminated water is still a major problem for her family, as she recently entered the real estate business.

"I got the license about the same time that all of the PFOA issues started in Hoosick Falls and now here so it's definitely affected how my business is taking off," Lockett said.

Lockett hopes a permanent resolution is implemented soon, before even more people fear buying a house in a place she's enjoyed calling home for 14 years.

"From my perspective I'm hoping that it blows over quickly and it's resolved quickly so property values can bounce back a little bit and people see Rensselaer County for what it is, just this gorgeous wonderful area to live and I'd hate to have people miss out on it because of what's going on right now," Lockett said.

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